162 inhabitants numbered 4,983,240). The greatest increase had occurred in the towns, largely as a result of the growth of industry. From 1926 to 1939 the urban population of the B.S.S.R. rose from 847,830 to 1,372,522; while the numbers of rural inhabitants remained almost constant: 4,135,410 in 1926 as compared with 4,195,454 in 1939.

In the Soviet Union as a whole, the population had increased by 15.9 per cent., from 147 million in December 1926 to over 170 million in 1939. However, whereas the numbers living in towns had more than doubled (26 million to 55.9 million); the rural population had decreased from 120.7 million to only 114.5 million.

No census has been taken in the Soviet Union since the war; and the present population of the B.S.S.R. is not definitely known. In October 1939, after the incorporation of the ex-Polish regions, it was about 10,386,000 inhabitants.

The principal cities of Byelorussia with their 1939 populations are Minsk, the capital (238,772), Vitebsk (167,424), Gomel (144,169), Mogilev (99,440), and Bobruisk (84,107). As compared with 1926 the populations of all these towns had increased from 64 to 98 per cent. by 1939.

War Losses

721 On June 22, 1941, the German armies, supported by their satellites,
727 attacked the Soviet Union on its 1,500-mile European front; and in the early phase of the war, succeeded in overrunning the western Soviet Republics of Byelorussia and the Ukraine. For the second time in this century these areas were subjected to German occupation and devastation.

Lying directly in the path of the enemy advance towards Moscow, the Byelorussian Republic experienced terrible destruction. Just one month after the initial Nazi attack, the German News Agency announced that the Byelorussian town of Vitebsk (which the Nazis, according to their claim, had captured on July 11), had been "nothing but ruins when occupied". As the war progressed, this black statement was to be true of most Byelorussian cities. In August 1941, according to an estimate by Allen and Muratoff,[1] the Germans were employing half their Panzer divisions and at least 40 per cent. of all their available forces in the Vitebsk-Smolensk-Mogilev sector.

Even after the Soviet Army retreat, Byelorussia continued to be a battle ground as Soviet guerillas carried on heroic warfare against the enemy occupying forces.

---

1 The Russian Campaigns of 1941-43, Allen and Muratoff, Penguin Books, London, 1944.